Excerpted from WATERFOWL TOMORROW - US Dept of Interior, Bureau of
Sport Fisheries & Wildlife, Fish & Wildlife
Service - GPO 1964

"Our Native Swans"

p. 160 As many as half of the eggs fail to hatch in some years. Success varied from 51 to 66 percent during 3 years of studies that were carried out at Red Rock Lakes. That was lower than the 55 to 92 percent recorded during 6 years at Grande Prairie. Infertility and the death of immature embryos are the main causes of failure.

The first week of life is most hazardous for the trumpeter cygnet, as it is for most other birds. Their clumsy parents may trample some cygnets. Others, on their first feeding ventures from the nest, become entangled in nearby plants and drown. Some cygnets fall prey to leeches and to parasites which infect internal organs. Weak birds may succumb from these causes.

Adult trumpeters molt their flight feathers in summer and are grounded for a month or more. The pen usually starts to lose her feathers about the time her cygnets hatch and is flightless with them for their first month or so. Whistling swans molt somewhat later with the pen becoming flightless about 2 weeks after the young hatch. The cob becomes flightless about the time the pen regains her flight, so that one or the other of the parents usually has the power of flight during the brood period. On the average, only two or three cygnets in a clutch survive to fly in autumn.

Young trumpeters usually start flying about the end of September. Young whistlers in the Far North probably become airborne a week or two earlier. Occasionally, when spring occurs late and winter sets in early, cygnets of both species may be still flightless at freezeup. Sometimes they find enough food to survive to flight stage, only to die of malnutrition and exhaustion in migration. Some never gain flight and perish on the breeding grounds.

--Winston E. Banko and R. H. Mackay